

DETROIT FREE PRESS (MI)
29 June 1986

Vice-admiral brings military aboard at security council

By JAMES MCCARTNEY
Free Press Washington Staff

WASHINGTON — In the six months since he became White House national security adviser, Vice-Adm. John Poindexter has packed his staff with Pentagon officials, producing a tough new line against the Soviet Union and its allies.

Poindexter has replaced four key staffers on the president's National Security Council who came from civilian backgrounds — either the State Department or Congress — with officials from the Pentagon.

Relying on advice filtered through that staff, Reagan has junked the SALT II nuclear arms control treaty, ordered the bombing of Libya and begun a major new effort to provide military aid to contras opposing Nicaragua's government.

White House records show that Poindexter's appointments have produced an NSC staff with an unprecedented tilt toward the military. Seven of the staff's 10 special assistants to the president have Pentagon backgrounds.

The precise role of any single staffer in formulating national security policy is virtually impossible to determine. Poindexter, who veteran White House observers call the most secretive and inaccessible national security adviser in the last 25 years, avoids interviews and has declined to answer questions about his operations or his motives.

His aides say he does not believe that dealing with the news media is a requirement of his job, even though he is the president's top foreign policy adviser and in a position to go over the heads of top cabinet members to put his stamp on decisions.

His recent predecessors — among them such well-known figures as Henry Kissinger, Zbigniew Brzezinski, McGeorge Bundy, Brent Scowcroft and Robert McFarlane — took the position that they owed some public explanation of their policy advice.

THE ADVISER'S JOB has become increasingly powerful in recent years because the views of cabinet-level departments often differ sharply, and the NSC adviser has been cast in the role of arbiter. He controls decision-making papers that flow to the president and often is the last person the president consults before making a decision.

State Department officials fear that Poindexter may be stacking the deck in the Pentagon's favor on key policy issues on which the State and Defense departments are deeply divided — including arms control, Central America, U.S.-Soviet relations, the Middle East and the use of military power as an instrument of diplomacy.

Many of his key appointments have been from the Navy, leading one former staff member to observe: "He is Navy-tizing the NSC, and that is becoming a serious problem. Poindexter is getting cocooned with his own types when he is supposed to be an honest broker" in interagency disputes.

"The question," said one State Department official, "is whether a military mind-set will come to dominate policy."

A White House official who works closely with Poin-

dexter said, "I think it's just a natural tendency of an admiral and a military man to choose people he is comfortable with."

THE FOUR SPECIAL ASSISTANTS to the president chosen by Poindexter are:

- Retired Navy Capt. Rodney McDaniel, as executive secretary of the council, a key job in management of the staff. He replaced a civilian economist.
- Air Force Col. Robert Linhard, who has assumed major responsibility in arms control, filling in for a civilian and former Senate staff aide, Ronald Lehman, who recently was appointed an arms control negotiator.
- James Kelly, an Asian affairs expert and former deputy assistant secretary of defense for international security affairs. He replaced a State Department career officer.
- Dennis Ross, whose background is Middle East affairs and who is a former deputy director of the Defense Department's Office of Net Assessment. He most recently has been associated with the Berkeley-Stanford program on Soviet international behavior. He also replaced a State Department career officer.

The appointment of McDaniel, an old friend of Poindexter at the Pentagon, is considered by some people close to the council as most significant.

"This is an absolutely key job," said one official, who asked not to be named. "Every single piece of paper, every action, goes across his desk. This guy knows everything."

In addition, Poindexter is considering appointing retired Rear Adm. William Cockell Jr. as a key deputy for defense policy, said a former NSC official in a position to know. Cockell apparently would assume some responsibility in the arms control field.

THE REAGAN ADMINISTRATION has been plagued by intense Pentagon-State department rivalries on basic policy issues which in general have broken down this way:

- Arms control. State favored the SALT II treaty. Pentagon civilians wanted to junk it. Poindexter sided with the Pentagon. One former NSC staff member, who like others interviewed for this article spoke on condition of anonymity, said: "I don't think the SALT II treaty would have been junked if the NSC was properly staffed."
- U.S.-Soviet relations. The State Department in general has favored a more conciliatory policy, emphasizing negotiation over confrontation, while the Pentagon has taken a harder line. Policy has gone back and forth.
- Central America. Again, the State Department has favored diplomatic approaches, while Pentagon civilians have favored military intervention. Policy has been at an impasse.

2 FILE ONLY

- Middle East. Poindexter's changes have bought in a more aggressive, pro-Israeli style. "It's going to be even tougher on the Arabs," one informed former NSC official said.
- Use of power. Poindexter "is more inclined to use military force as an instrument of diplomacy" than was McFarlane, said an NSC official who knows Poindexter well. The official cited the bombing of Libya.

Poindexter has made only one brief TV appearance since taking the job — on ABC's "Good Morning America" the morning of a key vote on aid to the Nicaraguan contras.

He has given two public speeches in the period — one at his son's graduation ceremony at Georgia Tech, the other to a chamber of commerce in his home state of Indiana. Both restated familiar administration positions.

Poindexter, 49, was first in his class at the U.S. Naval Academy in 1958 and holds a doctorate in nuclear physics from California Institute of Technology. He is described by those who have worked with him as a classical conservative.

"He doesn't like the Russians," said one. "He wants to poke them in the eye every chance he gets."

POINDEXTER ALSO HAS appointed two State Department career officials to important posts as his deputies, but only one is currently serving. That is Peter Rodman, former head of the State Department's policy planning staff.

The other, Donald Fortier, who was appointed principal deputy, is ill and has been unable to work for many weeks.

The three special assistants with Pentagon backgrounds who were inherited by Poindexter are:

- Kenneth deGraffenreid, special assistant for intelligence matters, a former Navy intelligence officer and aviator. He is a lieutenant commander in the naval air reserve.
- Walter Raymond Jr., special assistant for international communications, who has held both Pentagon and Army jobs, but is a CIA career officer.
- Retired Air Force Col. Ronald Sable, special assistant for legislative and legal affairs.

The three non-Pentagon special assistants remaining on the staff are Jack Matlock, Soviet affairs; Stephen Danzansky, international economic affairs, and Raymond Burghardt, Latin American affairs.